

Benefit-cost analysis

Advancing the Use of Evidence and Economics in State Government Policymaking

How can state governments make better use of the growing base of evidence about “what works” and thereby provide taxpayers improved returns on their dollars?

Background

Since the 1990s, the Washington State legislature has directed WSIPP to review research on “what works” (and what does not) in public policy. WSIPP’s work has spanned many topic areas, including criminal justice, education, child welfare, behavioral health, and prevention. In our systematic reviews, we assess the research evidence to identify public policies that improve statewide outcomes of legislative interest; we then estimate the benefits, costs, and risk associated with different options.

In recent years, representatives from other states have contacted us with an interest in duplicating Washington’s approach. The Pew-MacArthur Results First initiative, which funds part of WSIPP’s work, aims to enable other states to take a similar approach as Washington. As part of this project, WSIPP has developed a software-based application that allows analysts to input state-specific data to examine the cost and benefits of various policy choices that impact outcomes of interest to state governments.

WSIPP’s benefit-cost model includes a tool to analyze hypothetical “portfolios” of policy choices in order to forecast the overall impact on outcomes given a combination of policies and programs. In addition to projecting short- and long-term benefits and costs of portfolios, the new tool can also project future high school graduation, crime, and child abuse and neglect rates.

The current project

In 2014 and 2015, WSIPP’s “evidence and economics” approach will expand into new research areas, including:

- Medicaid,
- aging,
- public health, and
- workforce training.

WSIPP will also update and substantively extend analyses in previous areas, such as mental health, substance abuse, education, and crime.

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Marijuana Legalization Evaluation

Study Background

In November, 2012, Washington State voters passed Initiative 502 to regulate and tax marijuana for persons twenty-one years of age and older. As part of I-502, WSIPP was directed to “conduct cost-benefit evaluations of the implementation” of the law. The evaluations must include measures of impacts on public health, public safety, marijuana use, the economy, the criminal justice system, and state and local costs and revenues. A preliminary report is due to the legislature by September 1, 2015, with subsequent reports in 2017, 2022, and 2032.

Monitoring Trends in Use Prior to Implementation of I-502

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Child welfare

Child Welfare Performance-Based Contracts

The 2012 Washington State Legislature directed the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to enter into performance-based contracts by December 2013, with one or more network administrators for family support and related services. WSIPP must report to the Governor and the legislature regarding the conversion of existing contracts to performance-based contracts. An initial report is due prior to the 2014 legislative session, and the final report June 30, 2016.

Marna Miller, (360) 586-2745

Family Assessment Response

The 2012 Washington State Legislature directed DSHS to employ one of two responses for reports that are screened in and accepted for response: an investigation (currently the only option) or a family assessment. A family assessment is defined as a comprehensive assessment of child safety, risk of subsequent child abuse or neglect, and family strengths and needs that is applied to a child abuse or neglect report. The assessment does not include a determination as to whether child abuse or neglect occurred but does determine the need for services to address the safety of the child and the risk of subsequent maltreatment.

WSIPP will conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the family assessment response. The evaluation will include child safety measures, out-of-home placement rates, re-referral rates, and caseload sizes and demographics. A preliminary report is due by December 1, 2014, and the final report by December 1, 2016.

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Education

LAP Inventory: Effective Practices to Assist Struggling Students

The 2013 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to prepare an inventory of evidence- and research-based effective practices, strategies, and activities for school districts to use in the Learning Assistance Program (LAP).

The state program provides supplemental academic support to eligible K-12 students achieving below grade level or not on track to meet local or state graduation requirements. LAP funds may support programs in reading, writing, mathematics, and readiness, as well as programs to reduce disruptive behavior.

An initial report was released in July 2014. Updates will be published in July 2015, July 2016, and every two years thereafter.

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Mental health

Involuntary Treatment Risk Assessment

The 2013 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to develop a risk assessment instrument for patients committed for involuntary treatment in Washington State. The development of this instrument will build on the WSIPP's previous research in risk assessment for violent offenders and prior research on civil commitment in Washington State. This research assignment will extend through 2015.

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Longitudinal Evaluation of Crisis Mental Health Services and Involuntary Commitments in Washington State

Study Background

The 2014 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to complete a comprehensive assessment of the utilization and capacity needs for crisis mental health services provided by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The study will include the following:

- An update to statewide utilization and capacity figures;
- A longitudinal study of outcomes and certain public costs; and
- A review of practices in other states.

A preliminary report will be provided to the legislature by December 1, 2015, and a final report is due by December 1, 2016.

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Prevention

Tobacco and E-Cigarette Prevention

The 2014 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a comprehensive study of tobacco and e-cigarette prevention programs that will produce the highest public health benefit and reduce tobacco use.

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Washington State Institute for Public Policy

The Washington State Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors-representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities-governs WSIPP and guides the development of all activities. WSIPP's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.